

Citizens Liaison Committee for Community Center
Minutes – Jan. 4, 2005 – at Takoma Park recreation center, 7315 New Hampshire Ave.

Meeting convened at 7:40 p.m.

Members present:

Howard Kohn — chair
Annie Mozer – recorder
Ray Scannell
Stephanie Jennings
Erik Lichtenberg
Judy Dickinson
Maurice Belanger
Dallas Burtraw
Tom Gagliardo
Pam Larson
Peter Kovar
Lorraine Pearsall
Wayne Sherwood
Mary Carter-Williams
Carol Stewart
Karen Mendez
Alice Sims
Stephen Brown
Paul Chrostowski

Guests:

Jane Hurst
Eva Capelletti
Lucinda Leach

Staff:

Debra Haiduven

Brief presentation by Debra Haiduven, re: overall budget for Rec Dept.

Additional cost to operate the Com-Center, without a gym:

- \$150K/yr from Rec budget
- \$50K/yr from Library budget

This includes salaries, benefits, utilities, maintenance. Much of cost is for Computer Learning Center.

No estimate yet on revenues.

Depends on how we grid out use of the facility. Fee schedule to be determined by Council at a later date based on possible recommendations by Rec Committee.

HK -- Ballpark estimates for revenues: \$50K County subsidy for senior programs (Gaithersburg & Rockville currently qualify but TP does not), \$25-35K for rentals, fees, contractor shares, and \$15-25K for grants. Maybe \$100K/yr total.

WITH a gym:

It appears it would cost \$30K extra in personnel, but that is a rough estimate – even the hours of the proposed gym have not yet been determined, including ways to offset the fees based on income. Ballpark estimate for utilities & maintenance, also \$30K.

Erik Lichtenberg - After looking at previous Rec budgets, cost recovery is pretty low, about 30-40%. Do we have provisions for programs to pay for themselves, is there a business plan?

Debra – city council said adult programs should break even or better, senior programs are free, youth programs should not have to recover their costs – as we go forward, that may change. Rec Dept. doesn't decide business plan.

Question: Could new programs generate revenue?

HK- depends on programs, some will bring revenue, some will be subsidized.

Debra – once we serve the needs of the community, we can augment with revenue programs e.g. corporate rentals. Some current Rec programs make \$, like fencing.

Erik – what happens to participation if you increase the price?

Debra – For TP summer camp we used to charge \$150 for 8 wks, very minimal fee. Very popular program. Had to turn families away. We felt little risk in increasing price. But when we did increase price, noticeable drop in numbers

However, in after-school programs we've increased prices a little, and enrollment still is maxed out

Some people in this community need inexpensive programs, some don't.

HK – In soccer this year we raised the fee from \$40 to \$45, but did not net out increase of \$5/player, but rather \$2.25. Many players are subsidized because they can not afford full fee. Also, we received fewer donations above the normal fee.

Mary Carter-Williams – Good idea to present at least three options to Council. High level of subsidies, high level of revenues, and a middle option.

Erik – As a community, we have to decide on how to tax ourselves – what kind of money are we willing to spend here or on other things?

If we build a gym, can we make money on it? Not that I am saying we should, but we should have flexibility. Citizens would feel differently about gym with a range of choices.

Debra – If the gym is a revenue producer then the Rec Dept. doesn't have access to offer programs to kids. We need to have it broken down so we can weigh the pros and cons.

Dallas Burtraw – Mary's suggestion is a good one, have different scenarios available to choose from.

Peter Kovar – I also support Mary's idea.

HK – Perhaps a way to proceed is to create a working group or task force, which could also include members of Rec Committee. The group could work out a business plan to present to Council. More than one option, as Mary & Erik suggest.

HK – ICB calendar shows that Piney Branch, TPES & TPMS gyms are used almost fulltime. No room on the calendar to add any Rec programs. (ICB is the County agency that oversees use of schools during off hours.)

Debra – Plus ICB prohibits play with soccer balls or softballs in school gyms.

Dallas – TP families have to drive to Wheaton or Rockville to use gyms. Driving time is a big factor.

Debra – For tot programs, there is a huge demand, but we can't use school gyms during the school day.

HK – Another lack right now. Our outdoor sports teams get together at least twice a week, once for practice, once for games, but our indoor teams (basketball & soccer) only get together once a week, only on weekends, because there is not enough gym time. This diminishes the attractiveness of our indoor leagues.

Ray Scannell -- Certain sports have not been discovered in TP, floor hockey, cheerleading. When they are discovered there will be even more competition for space in gyms. Also, baseball and softball would love to have gym space in March & April because of unpredictability of weather. There is a lot of potential use a new gym.

Stephanie Jennings – How many people use Rec programs right now?

Debra – Participants are in the thousands.

At municipal building after school, kids just hang out.

Jane Hurst – The untapped need, kids who don't get involved in programs get into bad behavior.

Mary – Our mission is to specify the components of the gym. I don't know of too many community centers that don't have gyms today.

Peter- Can we calculate the savings of taking care of kids leading to a reduction in crime?

HK – Our “business plan” work group should explore cost benefit analysis of recreation & crime prevention.

Maurice Belanger – If we do go for a bond, does that make our chances less to get money from County or State?

HK – “The state owes us \$200K out of the \$2M they promised, which I believe we will still get. With the County, they have said no more capital money, but we should begin negotiations with them for rebate on operating expenses.

Erik – What about people who don’t use rec programs? Should they have to pay extra taxes?

Stephanie Jennings – Not everyone has a car, but we all pay for streets. Not everyone has children in public schools, but we all pay for them.

Pam Larson – We pay taxes for general quality of TP. The community center is not just for users and potential users, but neighbors need it as well.

Debra – Public facilities and parks do elevate the value of your property.

Re: Operating expenses, if I were to project, the 2nd year will be less expensive than the first because we by the 2nd year we will know how to cut costs and we will have more public-private partnerships. They can provide programs with little or no cost to taxpayers.

Tom Gagliardo – We need harder numbers for these projections.

- My father was immigrant kid so I don’t say rec programs don’t help people. That would be denying my own history. But real effect of amenities like a park or community center is who is attracted to the community. TP used to be a very eclectic neighborhood but now is becoming exclusive.

Stephanie – Gentrification is a regional issue. Everyone in this region has to spend more on their homes. There are certain givens about TP, proximity to the Metro, for instance, that will always make it attractive. Home prices will not go down here. But what is happening here is also happening in the region.

Paul Chrostowski – The underpinning question is the societal value of recreation. Do we as a community agree on the value of these programs? We agree on roads and schools. If we also feel recreation is important then it becomes a question of fine-tuning the cost.

Paul – Wearing my engineering hat, we need better numbers on capital construction, and operating and maintenance costs, including the gym, over the lifetime of this building. Let’s take the outside estimate of what gym and center will cost and project out the maintenance costs and operating costs as two separate facilities, and let’s break it down

to an hourly cost of the facility in the useable hours. ICB is under pressure to generate revenue. They do that on conscious cost model; they are increasing the rates. We need the same numbers to make intelligent decision. If we can get it down to a projected rate of cost per hour then the public will be able to decide on fees, accessibility, subsidies. I think we will find we will save money and we might make some money, but we need the numbers.

Lorraine Pearsall - Cost projections of gym depend on parking underneath and size of gym.

HK – We will meet with a representative from Knott. Should be able to get a pretty good estimate for gym, but Knott might suggest more geo-physical borings to help decide the question of parking below.

Wayne Sherwood – We have more experience now, a better sense of the site. We should be able to get better estimates than we had before construction started.

Eva Capelletti - Is there not one person on City staff responsible for overseeing the costs?

Tom – Where are the mayor and the council? Aren't they ultimately responsible for managing this project?

HK - Barb Matthews, the City manager, is probably the best person to explain how the project is being managed and how to arrive at best estimates. We can invite her to our next meeting, and meet with Knott at following meeting.

Lorraine – We should have some confidence in an estimate from an A & E firm.

Debra – My responsibility is the operating cost. I will help generate better numbers for a business plan.

Stephanie – Should performance space be part of this? It has potential for revenues.

HK – For our business plan, let's include the entire community center, with a gym, and an option w/o gym. For construction costs our focus should be the gym and associated expenses, parking, landscaping. De facto the gym is on a slower track. Council has talked about breaking bond into two stages, first, finish Phase One, second, deal with the gym.

Skylight and elevator are not currently in proposed budget for Phase One. A new elevator shaft is there, but current plan is to use existing elevator. Skylight is for atrium.

Alice – Is there adequate lighting without the skylight?

HK – Definitely better with natural light.

Jane – Let's cost them out to decide.

Paul -- Need to look at energy costs with skylight.

Jane – A second elevator is good when one elevator goes out.

Motion made and seconded to ask Council to cost out elevator and skylight as possible additions to Phase One. Motion passed. All ayes, except for two abstentions.

HK – Meeting for “business plan” group – Tuesday, Jan. 11th, 7:30 p.m., at 16 Jefferson Ave.

Adjourned at 9:30pm.